



'Dementia tax' defended by Tories amid criticism of social care shake-up

Farron brands policy 'May's poll tax' as influential Conservative MP joins backlash but minister insists there will be no U-turn over funding plans

Rowena Mason and Denis Campbell

Theresa May is coming under pressure to drop or water down her controversial shake-up of social care, which has been branded a "dementia tax", amid fresh warnings that it is unfair and could deter older people from seeking care.

The prime minister has faced a backlash about the proposal to make the elderly pay for care in their own home unless they have less than £100,000 in assets, as it will force people to use up the value of their residential property for the first time.

Conservative candidates are reporting that the proposal is going down badly on the doorstep, potentially accounting for a drop in the party's lead in the polls. Two Tory MPs, including Sarah Wollaston, the chair of the Commons health committee, have also gone on the record to criticise the shake-up.

Senior Conservatives, including Boris Johnson and Damian Green, were sent out to defend the policy yesterday as "grown up and responsible" but reports have emerged that the policy was inserted into the manifesto at the last minute without the approval of some cabinet ministers.

With the policy polling badly, opposition parties lined up to condemn the prime minister's decision, with Labour saying it was in effect a "dementia tax", hitting those who were unlucky enough to fall ill in their old age.

Tim Farron, the Lib Dem leader, branded it May's "version of the poll tax" that would lead to her downfall and his party claimed that nine in 10 properties could be used for payment if their owners were to need care at home. Another warning came from the King's Fund, an influential health thinktank, which said the plans risked deterring older people from seeking help in the first place and further burdening overstretched hospitals.

Richard Humphries, a senior fellow in social care at the thinktank, said: "It will mean thousands of people paying more for home care but will be complex and challenging for councils to implement and risks unintended consequences. "These might include discouraging people from seeking help, placing a greater burden on unpaid carers and driving increased use of hospitals and long-term care."

Under the plan, he added, "access to services will depend on a triple lottery of where you live, what you can afford and what is wrong with you". Develop cancer or heart disease, but not dementia, and your house and savings would remain intact, Humphries said.

The King's Fund's intervention adds to the warning from the Institute for

Any answers? Johnson fiddles amid burning questions on extra £350m a week for the NHS

Boris Johnson has suggested that Theresa May promised to give the NHS an extra £350m a week at the launch of the Conservative party manifesto, when neither she nor the document made any such promise.

The foreign secretary was pressed on why there was no pledge from the Tories to use any proceeds from Brexit to fund the NHS, when handing over £350m a week was a key promise of his campaign to leave the European Union. Asked on ITV's Peston on Sunday why the sum was not in the manifesto, Johnson said: "It is, Theresa May, she said it at the launch of the manifesto ... She said we are going to take back control."

Peston, ITV News political editor, asked: "Where?" - but Johnson launched straight into a speech about how the election was a contest between May and Jeremy Corbyn as leaders.

At the manifesto launch, May promised to "take back control of [EU] structural funds and use them to strengthen our union and reduce inequalities between our communities". However, there was no mention of any of this money specifically going to the NHS.

A senior Tory source said Johnson was saying that a commitment to take money back from the EU and spend it on services such as the NHS was in the manifesto, but he had been cut off several times by the interviewer.

Since the referendum, May and her cabinet ministers have repeatedly been challenged about why they are not honouring the pledge that was emblazoned on a bus used to transport Johnson on the campaign trail.

The former leave strategist Dominic Cummings suggested that it was instrumental in helping the leave campaign win.

Vote Leave Watch, a group pressing for the pledge to be honoured, has accused Johnson of "taking the public for fools".

Johnson was also caught sneaking a look at Peston's questions before their television encounter yesterday morning.

Peston later tweeted a series of pictures that showed Johnson rifling through his notes while he was questioning other guests.

"Here's Boris stealing and copying my homework (ie reading questions I planned for him), while I interviewed Nicholas Soames & Jess Phillips," he wrote.

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Fiscal Studies, which said last week that the policy "makes no attempt to deal with the fundamental challenge of social care funding".

A separate analysis by Luke Clements, professor of law at Leeds University, argued that the proposals could act as an incentive for older people to transfer their properties into their children's names or offshore, and would land local authorities with debt portfolios of many millions.

Senior cabinet ministers took to the airwaves yesterday to insist that the policy was the right course of action but they also stressed that the proposal would be consulted on over the summer, paving the way for a possible softening.

Boris Johnson, the foreign secretary, said it was a "responsible" and "brave" move by May but said he understood people's concerns. "Whatever happens, people are going to be able to live in their own home. They will have that anxiety taken away and they will be able to pass on a minimum of £100,000 to their kids," he told ITV's Peston on Sunday.

"I do understand people's reservations and the questions people are asking about some of the detail but the broad thrust is right and, as the PM has said, there will be a consultation on getting it right."

Green, the work and pensions secretary, said there would be no U-turn over the policy but also emphasised the consultation. "We have set out this policy, which we're not going to look at again," he told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.

During the programme, Green was confronted with calculations suggesting that a widow living in an average-priced house in his own constituency of Ashford in Kent would have to pay an extra £70,000 towards the cost of home care for dementia.

"I suspect that figure requires heroic assumptions," Green said. "She should vote Conservative and her children should vote Conservative because whatever level of care she needs, that removes that terrible decision of how long should you try and keep someone at home or maybe put them into residential care."

The cabinet minister also stumbled over the withdrawal of the winter fuel allowance for some pensioners, admitting that he could not say which individuals would lose out as a result of new means-testing. "If they are in genuine need of the winter fuel payment they will still get it," he told the Andrew Marr Show.

"That's what we're going to consult on after the election. That's the sensible way to do it. That is the way a grown-up government will operate," he added.

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Theresa May at church in her Maidenhead constituency with Philip, her husband. Right, Jeremy Corbyn playing an erhu at the Wah Sing Chinese centre in Liverpool; left, the debate in Edinburgh, with from left: Kezia Dugdale, Scottish Labour's leader; Nicola Sturgeon, SNP leader and first minister; and the Scottish Tory leader, Ruth Davidson



John Crace's sketch Dim and Dimmer come a cropper

Damian Green, the work and pensions secretary, on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show yesterday



called a snap election, and under the circumstances this was the best they had been able to come up with in a couple of weeks. The manifesto was clearly a document. It was on paper. Therefore it was a realistic document. "There's an £8bn hole in your plans for NHS spending," Marr pointed out. Dim twitched nervously. There wasn't, they were just reallocating £8bn of existing NHS funding, Dim said. "That's not true," said Marr. Dim wisely chose not to contradict this. Things quickly turned worse when Marr moved on to winter fuel payments. These were completely uncapped, as no one knew what level they would be means tested. "They aren't uncapped," Dim said defensively. It was just that they hadn't yet been properly costed. Or rather, they might have been, but it just wasn't the right moment to let everyone know what the costings were. There was no point bothering voters with loads of numbers just before an election. Dim was equally out of his depth when asked to justify the government's social care proposals that targeted those suffering from dementia, rather than adopting the advice of the Dilnot report.

He struggled to do the sums on what the changes might mean to someone with a £250K house in Ashford, rambled about there not being the right financial products in place and rather implied that we should stop being so negative. Rather than focusing on all those with dementia who would be left with £100K - and let's face it, they would all be too far gone to notice - why didn't we concentrate on all those lucky enough to die of cancer who would be able to pass on £1m to their relatives tax free? Why stop at one car crash when you can have two? Having sent Green on to Marr, the Tories chose to double down by allowing Boris Johnson on the Peston Show. Dim and Dimmer. If Dim had been hoping to supply some gravitas, Dimmer's tactic was to go for full-on levitas. His hair was even more artfully dishevelled than usual and all that was missing was the clown makeup. He even tried to sneak a peak of the questions while Peston's back was turned. Not for the first time, his comic timing was off. "Why are you picking on people with dementia?" Peston inquired, quite reasonably. Dimmer bumbled on, hoping that some vaguely plausible

With Green on Marr, the Tories doubled down by allowing Boris on Peston

answer might come to him. It didn't. The best he could manage was that the government had to pick on someone, so it might as well start with the demented. Peston appeared as startled by this answer as everyone else and asked if Dimmer had been consulted about the contents of the manifesto before it was published. Dimmer was horrified by the suggestion. Why on earth would the Supreme Leader bother to talk to her cabinet about anything? Though he was thrilled that she had promised an extra £350m per week to the NHS. "She didn't say anything of the sort," said Peston. Dimmer just smirked. When caught telling a blatant lie, smirking is his default response. At which point, a small smattering of self-awareness began to bubble in what passed for Dimmer's consciousness. He had strayed off the Strong and Stable Leader message. Time to mention Kim Jong-May. "What people have to realise is that the election is a choice between Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn," he said. Schoolboy error. Dimmer had just reminded everyone of the clear and present danger posed by him also being involved in the Brexit negotiations.

Scottish debate Sturgeon accuses Davidson of dancing to May's tune

Severin Carrell Scotland editor

Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Tory leader, was accused of being the prime minister's puppet and a liar over Britain's departure from the EU during ill-tempered exchanges in a live election debate.

Davidson, whose party threatens to seize up to a dozen seats in Scotland in the general election, was attacked by her rivals for changing her stance over Brexit.

At the start of a BBC debate where the first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, later came under direct attack over pay for nurses, Sturgeon said Davidson had begun by opposing Brexit, then wanted Scotland to remain inside the single market and now opposed single market membership, in line with the UK government's policy.

"First she said we needed a seat at the negotiating table and now she has changed her mind," Sturgeon stated. "It seems to me that Ruth Davidson does everything that Theresa May tells her to do."

£36bn Brexit risk

Economists have warned that failure to strike an EU deal giving access to the single market for services would cost the UK economy £25bn to £36bn a year, following a fresh threat from ministers to walk away from talks if Brussels demands an excessive bill.

The Centre for Economics and Business Research said a good scenario for the UK if it failed to strike a deal on services would be a 1.4% drop in national income, working out at a bit of £25bn. The analysis, commissioned by pressure group Open Britain, said this would rise to a loss of 2% of annual national income - or £36bn - if the UK lost access to the services market without striking deals with other parts of the world. Sectors most at risk, it said, were financial services, IT, telecoms and transport. Rowena Mason

Davidson retorted by accusing Sturgeon of dishonesty about her positions on Europe, by attempting to tell voters she wanted to take part in the prime minister's Brexit talks while simultaneously pushing for a fresh independence referendum.

"Nicola Sturgeon says she wants a seat at the Brexit table but she wants Scotland to be out of the UK and into the eurozone," Davidson said. "I ask myself which side of the table does she want to be sat on?"

But her past record on Brexit came under attack again from Willie Rennie, the Scottish Liberal Democrats leader, who recalled Davidson's starring role as a remain campaigner in live debates during the EU referendum campaign.

In one of those debates, she argued vigorously against Boris Johnson, now foreign secretary, and then a prominent leave campaigner. "Ruth Davidson called Boris Johnson a liar on three occasions," Rennie said. "Now she's standing with Theresa May arguing for a hard Brexit. She's talking about the opportunities that it

Universities Labour sets out timetable for an end to tuition fees

Rowena Mason Deputy political editor

New university students will be freed from paying £9,000 in annual tuition fees as early as this autumn if Labour wins the election, Jeremy Corbyn will say today.

The Labour leader and Angela Rayner, shadow education secretary, will say tuition fees will be abolished through legislation from 2018 onwards.

But students starting courses in September will also have their first-year fees written off retrospectively to discourage them from deferring their studies for a year.

Labour said it would also seek to give free tuition to EU students, and seek reciprocal arrangements at EU universities as part of the Brexit negotiations.

Students part-way through courses will no longer have to pay fees from 2018, meaning those starting their final year in September would be the last cohort liable for the £27,000 of debt to be paid back when a graduate passes an earnings threshold.

Those students will be protected from above inflation interest rate rises on their debt and the party will look for ways to reduce their future burden, Labour said.

"The Conservatives have held students back for too long, saddling them with debt that blights the start of their working lives," Corbyn will say. "Labour will lift this cloud of debt and make education free for all as part of our plan for a richer Britain for the many not the few. We will scrap tuition fees and ensure universities have the resources they need to continue to provide a world-class education. Students will benefit from having more money in their pockets, and we will all benefit from the engineers, doctors, teachers and scientists that our universities produce."

Labour has said it will fund the £9.5bn policy by raising tax on higher earners, with those earning more than £80,000 paying a 45p tax rate and those earning above £110,000 a year paying a 50p rate.

The party said its policy should give 18-year-olds another reason to register to vote before tonight's midnight deadline.

As well as abolishing university tuition fees, Labour will restore the maintenance grants the Tories abolished in 2016.

Labour gave more details of its policy as Corbyn prepared to join deputy leader Tom Watson to launch the party's arts and culture policy in the north of England today.

Labour has had a poll boost in recent days, with the Tory lead cut to nine percentage points in a Sunday Times YouGov survey, after an apparent backlash against Theresa May's social care proposals.

The Conservatives are trying to turn the agenda back to the issue of leadership, with Ben Wallace, a security minister, accusing Corbyn yesterday of "siding with Britain's enemies".

Wallace spoke after the Labour leader faced repeated questioning in a Sky News interview about whether he would condemn the IRA, following newspaper stories about his links to figures in the militant group in the 1980s.

Corbyn said: "Bombing is wrong, of course all bombing is wrong and of course I condemn it ... I think what you have to say is all bombing has to be condemned and you have to bring about a peace process. In the 1980s, Britain was looking for a military solution in Ireland. It clearly



Festival surprise guest

Jeremy Corbyn made a surprise appearance at a music festival headlined by The Libertines and The Coral in Merseyside at the weekend.

He spoke in front of an estimated 20,000 people at the Wirral Live festival in Birkenhead, as music fans awaited sets by the two bands.

At the event at Prenton Park, the home of Tranmere Rovers football club, he spoke about making Premier League clubs invest 5% of their income to support grassroots football.

However, he was partially drowned out by crowds singing "Jezza, Jezza" and "Oh, Jeremy Corbyn".

He asked the Merseyside crowd: "Do you want health, do you want housing, do you want care, do you want a society coming together or do you want selective education and fox hunting?"

After his appearance, Corbyn tweeted: "Great to speak at Prenton Park to this incredible crowd about Labour's transformational manifesto that will deliver #ForTheMany."

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was never going to work. Ask anyone in the British army at that time.

"Therefore you have to seek a peace process. You condemn the violence of those that laid bombs that killed large numbers of innocent people and I do."

Asked to condemn the IRA without equating it to the deaths caused by Britain's security services, Corbyn said: "And there were loyalist bombs as well, which you haven't mentioned. I condemn all the bombing by the loyalists and the IRA."

If the Conservatives win the election, sources suggest Corbyn would want to stay on as leader if he matches Ed Miliband's vote share from 2015.

Frank Field, who is seeking re-election as Labour MP for Birkenhead, called for any new leader to be chosen by the parliamentary party, not members, but with Corbyn's manifesto as a starting point.

"In the event of a defeat ... Jeremy's manifesto must be the point from which a new parliamentary Labour party alone chooses a parliamentary leader who is able to build trust and legitimacy with the electorate," he said in a letter to the Guardian.

"For the new leader ... to revert to Blairism would miss the point of just how much Jeremy has changed centre-left politics. The test which must be passed ... is to combine a popular programme with a leader who possesses prime ministerial qualities."

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